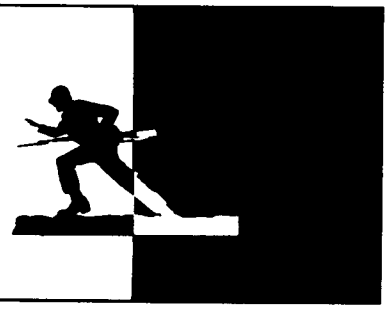
INFANTRY LETTERS



60MM MORTAR SOLUTION IS ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL

Some of the officers in my unit have asked me to respond to Mr. Richard K. Fickett's letter in INFANTRY's January-February 1994 issue (page 3)—to set the record straight before he is taken too seriously and someone actually acts on his recommendations and uses up more time, effort, or money.

I have more than 16 years of active duty experience as an indirect fire infantryman; have served as a platoon sergeant in three different mortar platoons—two of which had the M224 LWCM; and in 1986 graduated from the Infantry Mortar Leaders Course.

Mr. Fickett's recommendation to mount two cannons on one baseplate in order to reduce the size of the section and to reduce the weight for one crew to carry and employ do not add up to an improved mortar system, better indirect fire coverage, or an increase in the section's ability to accomplish its tactical mission.

His weight figures do not include the plug-in socket adapter or the dual cannon collar on the bipod, which would increase the weight of the bipod and require reinforcement of the shock absorbers. With dual cannons on one bipod, an assistant gunner would have to reach over the muzzle of one cannon to load the other, and both cannons would have to go out of action if one of them experienced a misfire. Firing a mission that required a special sheaf or coordinated illumination and high explosive would be impossible with the ammunition the mortar section is now issued from the Army's inventory. Adjusting and firing final protective fires and simultaneous missions would not be possible with the bi-azimuth cannon alignment as he describes it. Airborne infantry would not find it practical to fit a bipod with a dual collar into the M1950 weapon container; even the current bipod extends out of the container, and the traversing mechanism's handle is exposed during airborne operations.

With the wide range of fire support assets available to the infantry company commander—artillery, close air support, naval gun fire, and helicopter gunships—it is still the company's organic 60mm mortar section that provides him the most flexible, responsive, and continuous fire support with a bursting radius small enough to engage the enemy close in without exposing his own troops to unnecessary danger.

In his letter, Mr. Fickett is accurate as to the number of personnel and the weight of the equipment he mentions; however, he fails to mention that the section also has two M23 mortar ballistic computers (eight pounds each), two M8 baseplates (three to six pounds each), plus the M17 plotting boards, the M115 boresight, and the aiming posts with aiming post lights. The section carries a heavy load, and add to that the radio, mortar ammunition, small arms ammunition, food, water, and the generic rucksack packing list.

The M224 60mm lightweight company mortar is not employed exclusively as a line of sight weapon, as the letter implies. The fact is that firing any mortar in the direct-lay mode is the least desirable technique because it exposes the mortar crew to enemy observation and enemy direct fire weapons. The 60mm mortar section is tactically employed and evaluated in accordance with the ARTEP 7-90 MTP and Field Manual 7-90 just like the 81mm or 107mm mortar platoons, and must perform the same missions. The M17 plotting boards and the M23 mortar ballistic computers provide the section with the capability to fire accurately from concealed and defilade positions without unnecessary exposure to the enemy.

I agree that Mr. Fickett has indeed identified a problem: That problem is the absence of dedicated ammunition bearers and the difficulty of resupplying mortar ammunition. The solution, as I see it, is not another costly study or a reconfiguration of the current 60mm mortar system; it is to increase the mortar section's authorized personnel strength.

In this era of force downsizing, the idea of increasing the size of the 60mm mortar section may not be popular with senior leaders, but it is not the senior leaders who will be exposed to hostile environments, facing the enemy in combat, or carrying the infantryman's load. What it will take to win the first battle of the next war is more personnel trained for combat. An authorized ammunition bearer and assistant ammunition bearer and a dedicated radio-telephone operator will increase the productivity, combat readiness, and survivability of the mortar section.

The load of weapons, ammunition, radios, night observation devices, water, and equipment will then become more manageable, and an increased amount of mortar ammunition can be inserted with the section. In addition, the section will be better able to defend itself. The section will maintain its flexibility and responsiveness to simultaneous missions, coordinated high explosive and illumination missions, and split section operations.

Currently, the infantry company commander would have to divert other elements of his command to make sure his mortars do not fall victim to a small enemy element that happens upon them on a recon, or that has been by-passed by friendly forces. Once it begins to fire, the mortar section is no longer able to conceal its location because of the

sound of the mortars, and each member of the section is occupied with completing the mission of providing close, continuous, timely, and accurate indirect fire support. The additional ammunition bearer, along with assisting with the ammunition and equipment load, also provides a direct fire weapon and the eyes and ears to give early warning of an approaching enemy.

If Mr. Fickett and other concerned individuals truly want a better equipped and stronger military, it will take more than the modification of existing equipment; it will take payroll dollars to increase manpower strengths for some positions and to be an incentive for productive soldiers to stay in the Army. It will also take training dollars to provide the equipment, ammunition, and fuel to maintain a force that is ready to respond to the world situation and enforce U.S. policies and objectives.

ROBERT S. UNDERWOOD
SFC, Weapons Platoon Sergeant
Company C, 3d Battalion,
75th Ranger Regiment
Fort Benning, Georgia

TAKING ISSUE

As a warrant officer assigned to a National Guard engineer battalion, I have subscribed to INFANTRY for many years. I read it from cover to cover and apply lessons learned and the authors' experience to my unit, when applicable.

Lieutenant Patrick M. Walsh's article, "The Leadership Role of the Company Executive Officer," which appeared in the November-December 1993 issue, was very informative, and all company XOs, regardless of branch, can learn from his guidance.

I take issue, however, with the lieutenant's description of the motor sergeant as "the least knowledgeable and usually most junior" member of the company staff. This may be true in the Active Army, but in the National Guard the company motor sergeant is usually the company's most senior and most experienced NCO (other than the first sergeant). In the Reserve Components, considering that our equipment is not used as often as that of the Active Army, the maintenance of our equipment is critical to the commander's overall readiness.

I'm not saying that equipment readiness is not also critical to active units, just that in most cases Reserve Component units regard their motor sergeants as NCOs who are crucial to the readiness of the unit, and that is why you will find experienced senior NCOs in that position.

JOHN J. PURPURO
CW2, New Jersey Army
National Guard
Unit Maintenance Technician
Hackensack, New Jersey

HPM TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

The Seventh National Conference on High Power Microwave Technology will be held at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 31 October to 4 November 1994. The conference is sponsored by the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command and the Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, D.C.

The conference theme is "HPM Technology in Transition." It will provide a forum for technical exchange in both narrowband and wideband source technologies, system effects, and mission applications. The conference and its proceedings will be classified SECRET/NOFORN/WNINTEL. Members of the Department of Defense and other Federal agencies, industry, and academia are invited.

Further information is available from HPM Conference Registration Office, P.O. Box 2218, Suffolk, VA 23432; telephone (804) 255-0409, FAX (804) 255-0056.

BRENDA K. VAUGHAN
Assistant Technical
Conference Coordinator

REUNION, SOCIETY OF THE FIRST DIVISION

The Society of the First Division (Big Red One)—which is composed of soldiers who served in World War I, World War II, Vietnam, DESERT STORM, and in peacetime—will hold its 76th Annual Reunion 17-21 August 1994 in Kansas City, Missouri.

Anyone who wants additional information may write to me at 5 Montgomery Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118, or call (215) 836-4841.

ARTHUR L. CHAITT
Executive Director

AIR FORCE ACADEMY HISTORY SYMPOSIUM

The United States Air Force Academy will hold its Sixteenth Military History Symposium, titled "Tooling for War: Military Transformation in the Industrial Age," 21-23 September 1994.

For further information, anyone who is interested may write to me at HQ USAFA/DFH, 2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 6F37, USAF Academy, CO 80840-6246, or call (719) 472-3230/FAX (719) 472-2970.

JOHN T. FARQUHAR
MAJ, USAF
Executive Director